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ABSTRACT

Group identification is a major cause of religious, racial, and international conflict. Many forms of group identification are fantasy bonds, imagined connections with others offering security at the expense of individual self-realization. The fantasy bond forms in childhood in response to inadequate parenting. Human beings are not inherently aggressive, but interpersonal tension in families leads to hostile and defensive behaviors first acted out on family members and later extended to outsiders. These bonds become reinforced as the child becomes aware of death's inevitability. Social systems represent a pooling and projection of individual defense mechanisms into a cultural framework as mores, traditions, and secular religious beliefs. These traditions and beliefs become imaginary survival mechanisms for the individual, a way to deny death's finality. Since they represent immortality, these world views are strongly defended by their adherents, who feel threatened by groups with other beliefs, and will fight to defend their point of view. The outgroup is seen as peculiar, impure, or evil. Outbreaks of violence will continue to be a problem until destructive child-rearing practices and social processes fostering aggression change, and death is accepted as the natural end of life. (Contains 109 references.) (CC)

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ORIGINS OF ETHNIC STRIFE

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Ethnicity and ethnic wars are related to man's attempt to defend against emotional pain and death anxiety. Psychological defenses formed originally to cope with childhood trauma are reinforced as the child becomes aware of death's inevitability. These defenses become an imaginary survival mechanism for the individual. Social systems represent a pooling of these individual defense mechanisms projected into a cultural framework as mores, traditions, and secular religious beliefs. People have a strong stake in their world views, feel threatened by groups manifesting other beliefs, and will fight to the death to defend their point of view. The author contends that the terror surrounding the end of existence as one knows it drives individuals to merge their identity with the group and challenge, attack, or otherwise attempt to eliminate people of different persuasions. The outgroup is seen as peculiar, impure, or evil because alternative systems are perceived as a threat to their own symbols of immortality.

INTRODUCTION

You've got to be taught to hate and fear.
You've got to be taught from year to year,
You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate.
You've got be carefully taught.

From *Carefully Taught*
(Rodgers & Hammerstein)

The words of this song from the musical, *South Pacific*, pertain to one aspect of a powerful defense mechanism that reifies the family, shrouding it and other forms of group identification in a fantasy bond that assures immortality in the face of death anxiety. The fantasy bond, an illusory connection or imagined fusion with another or others, offers security at the expense of self-realization, autonomy, and individuation (Firestone, 1984, 1985). The fantasy solution that arises to counter interpersonal trauma and separation anxiety must be protected from all intrusion. This protection predisposes aggressiveness, hostility, and malice toward those who challenge its function. The combined projection of individual defense mechanisms into a social framework make up a significant aspect of culture, and these consensually validated social mores and rituals in turn affect individual personality development. Members of a given social group or society have a considerable stake in how they perceive reality, and their emotional security is fractured when individuals or groups manifest alternative perceptions. Indeed, cultural patterns, religious beliefs, and mores that are different from our own threaten core defenses that act as a buffer against terrifying emotions (Becker, 1975; Solomon, Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1991). People will fight to the death to defend their customs and traditions against others who perceive and interpret reality in different terms.

The distinctive elements that support cultural integrity and loyalty in a specific group or society are at once a source of beauty and of human destructiveness. Paradoxically, the myriad of cultural patterns based on racial, religious, and ethnic differences make for creative individuation and fascinating variations in the world scene, yet at the same time arouse insidious hostilities that could eventually threaten life on the planet. Indeed, ethnicity and ethnic strife are the major problem facing mankind at the turn of the century (Hacker, 1992; Moynihan, 1993; Schlesinger, 1991). Although issues of economics and territo-

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riality are other stimuli for man's hostility toward man, the author supports the position that ethnic hatred and violence constitute the more significant threat. The rapid advance of technology and destructive potential is far outracing man's rationality (Mumford, 1966). Unless we understand the nature of the psychological defense mechanisms that play a major part in man's intolerance and savagery, the human race will be threatened by extinction.

An Integrative Approach

> The tragedy of the human condition is that man's awareness and true self-consciousness concerning existential issues contribute to an ultimate irony: Man is both brilliant and aberrant, sensitive and savage, exquisitely caring and painfully indifferent, remarkably creative and incredibly destructive to self and others.
>
> From "The Dilemma of Psychotherapy" (Firestone, 1988, p. 253)

This paper examines the dynamics of what I consider to be the most important underlying cause of controversy and violence in the world today: an individual's need to maintain powerful defenses of repression and denial when faced with the terrifying awareness of his or her aloneness and mortality. The approach set forth here integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought (Firestone, 1985, 1988, 1990c). This integration is crucial in understanding the forces originating within the nuclear family and manifested later in society that drive people to aggressive acts against others.

There are two major sources of emotional pain and anxiety that function to diminish people's essential humanness and arouse aggression: (1) pain caused by interpersonal relationships, characterized by deprivation, rejection, and overt or covert hostility on the part of parents, family members, and significant others; and (2) pain arising from basic existential issues of aloneness, aging, illness, and death.

To develop a complete dynamic picture of defense formation and man's subsequent aggression, one must recognize that the fantasy bond, a core defense against both kinds of pain, is formed in response to inadequate or destructive parenting in early childhood and is later reinforced as the youngster experiences a growing awareness of death (Anthony, 1971; Firestone, 1985; Kastenbaum, 1974; Nagy, 1948/1959; Rochlin, 1967). Children pass through successive stages of separation anxiety leading up to confronting the reality of death. Thereafter, man's most profound terror centers on contemplation of the obliteration of the ego, the total loss of the self (Choron, 1963, 1964; Meyer, 1975; Stern, 1968, Zilboorg, 1943). People employ both idiosyncratic individual defense mechanisms and social defenses to protect themselves against death anxiety (Becker, 1973; Lifton, 1977; Rank, 1941/1958).

Much of man's aggression can be attributed to the fact that he conspires with others to create cultural imperatives, institutions, and beliefs that are designed to deny his true condition (Becker, 1962, 1975). These socially constructed defenses never "work" completely as a solution to the problem of man's mortality; if they did work, there would be no need for controversy and no reason to go to war over differences in religion, race, or customs. On some level, people remain unsure despite strong and rigid belief systems (Berger & Luckman, 1967). The fear of death still intrudes on their consciousness, particularly when they are confronted by others with alternative resolutions that challenge their own.

Unfortunately, people are willing to sacrifice themselves in war to preserve their nation's or religion's particular symbols of immortality in a desperate attempt to achieve a sense of mastery over death. This same desperation can also be observed in the prisoner on death row who chooses to commit suicide, thereby taking control over the time of his/her death rather than enduring the unbearable anxiety of waiting for the hour of execution (Firestone & Seiden, 1987). In each case, actual death is preferable to the anticipatory anxiety and uncertainty surrounding the imagination of a death beyond our control.

Review of the Literature

In our review, I will address a number of perspectives related to the causes of racial conflict, terrorism, and war. These may be roughly divided into the following areas of inquiry: (1) theories and empirical research concerning the origins of human aggression; (2) theories that specifically link group identification to aggressive warlike behavior; (3) research of social psychologists in relation to prejudice and racism; and (4) Ernest Becker's existential/psychological synthesis on the origins of social evil. Space does not permit more than a cursory review of these approaches.

Theories of Human Aggression

Many scholars have viewed human aggression as the key issue in ethnic strife and war. Research studies conducted by primatologists and social scientists have been based for the most part on the assumption that human beings are naturally aggressive because of their close kinship with the primates who are aggressively competitive for mates and territory (Ardrey, 1966; Goodall, 1986; Lorenz, 1963/1966; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). "According to Lorenz, who was awarded the Nobel prize for his work in animal behavior, the appetite of humans for violence has the status of an instinct" (Lore & Schultz, 1993, p. 17).

Freud (1920/1955) contended that the aggressive drives (id), based on a death instinct, are so powerful that they must inevitably prevail over reason (ego) or conscience (superego). The primatologists cited above tend to support Freud's theory that human aggression is instinctual. Nevertheless, this point of view has been under severe attack in recent years (Berkowitz, 1989; Eron, 1987; Fromm, 1986; Holloway, 1967; Montagu, 1976). A number of theorists contend that prevailing theories on aggression (the instinct theory, the aggression-frustration model, and social learning theories) are contradictory and confusing and should be reexamined in order to clarify the specific environmental conditions that arouse aggressive impulses and violent acts in individuals (D. Campbell, 1975; Lore & Schultz, 1993). In a comprehensive review of the varied theories on human aggression, Lore and Schultz argued that "there is now sufficient information to demonstrate that popular views on the nature of aggression in both humans and animals need major revision" (p. 17).

The author agrees with those who challenge the Freudian contention that man's aggression is a derivative of the death instinct. I subscribe to Miller and Dollard's (Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939; Miller & Dollard, 1941) view that aggression is primarily frustration-derived and that human beings are not inherently destructive, aggressive, or self-destructive.[1] They become hostile, violent, or suicidal because of the pain or frustration they experience in relation to deprivation of basic needs and desires and later in response to death anxiety. Those theorists who believe in the death instinct as the most powerful driving force in the id are naturally pessimistic about mankind's future, whereas the belief that aggression is based on frustration and other environmental factors offers a more hopeful outlook and implies constructive action.

Approaches to Group Identification

Many theorists assert that group identification is a major causative factor in religious, racial and international conflict. Freud's (1921/1955) work on the subject, which stressed the "mindlessness of the group mind" supports my own thesis that group membership offers a false sense of superiority, specialness, and omnipotence to individuals who feel helpless and powerless in an uncertain world (Firestone, 1985).

In "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," Freud noted that:

> A group is extraordinarily credulous and open to influence, it has no critical faculty, and the improbable does not exist for it.... A group knows neither doubt nor uncertainty. (p. 78)

Extending these concepts to religious groups, Freud argued that believers naturally experience malice and animosity toward nonbelievers:

> Those people who do not belong to the community of believers...stand outside this tie. Therefore a religion, even if it calls itself the religion of love, must be hard and unloving to those who do not belong to it. (p. 98)

Fromm (1941, 1950) traced the social and psychological elements of the Nazi movement to their sources in the Age of Reformation. He went on to explain that existential fears of aloneness and the "terrifying responsibility of freedom" compel people to take actions as a group that would be unthinkable to them as individuals:

> There is nothing inhuman, evil, or irrational which does not give some comfort provided it is shared by a group.... Once a doctrine, however irrational, has gained power in a society, millions

1 My understanding of human aggression also takes into account social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Berkowitz, 1989). Okey (1992) reviewed the theoretical approaches to aggressive behavior in his paper, "Human Aggression: The Etiology of Individual Differences."

> of people will believe in it rather than feel ostracized and isolated. (1950, p. 33)

It is the author's hypothesis that identification with a particular ethnic or religious group is at once a powerful defense against death anxiety and a system of thought and belief that can set the stage for hatred and bloodshed. Group identification provides individuals with an illusion of immortality through imagined fusion with the membership. Conformity to the belief system of the group, that is, to its collective symbols of immortality, protects one against the horror of facing the objective loss of self. In merging his/her identity with that of a group, each person feels that although he/she may not survive as an individual entity, he/she will live on as part of something larger which *will* continue to exist after he/she is gone.[2]

Recent Research on Prejudice and Racism

Studies conducted by Tajfel (Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971) showed that "the variable of social categorization *per se* is sufficient as well as necessary to induce forms of ingroup favouritism and discrimination against the outgroup" (Turner, 1978, p. 101). Turner expanded Tajfel's work by including social competition as an important factor influencing group discrimination.

More recently, researchers have stressed that cognitive distortions alone do not sufficiently explain the hatred and violence accompanying prejudice, racism, and ethnocentric hostilities. They assert that affective factors and mechanisms of social influence, including those of conformity and childhood socialization (Lambert & Klineberg, 1967), need to be included in studies of racism (Byrne; 1971; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Duckitt, 1992; Goldstein & Davis, 1972; Meindl & Lerner, 1984; Moe, Nacoste, & Insko, 1981; Tesser, 1988). Hamilton (1981) has called attention to the fact that cognitive approaches to prejudice have serious limitations: one is their neglect of affect. He suggested that people attach more emotion to their distorted views of "different" groups than to their most significant interpersonal relationships: "If there is any domain of human interaction that history tells us is laden with strong, even passionate, feelings, it is in the area of intergroup relations" (p. 347).

Recent studies concerning people's need to maintain self-esteem are relevant to our discussion of prejudice. Becker (1962) and Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (1991) have proposed that self-esteem functions as an anxiety buffer against death anxiety:

> A substantial portion of our social behavior is directed toward sustaining faith in a shared cultural worldview (which provides the basis for self-esteem) and maintaining a sense of value within that cultural context. (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991, p. 118)

In my work, I have described a number of defensive maneuvers that people use to bolster their self-esteem and feelings of self-importance. The defenses of disowning one's own negative or despised characteristics and projecting these traits onto others help one maintain self-esteem, albeit falsely, and provide the basis for prejudice and racism. People of one ethnic group tend to dispose of their self-hatred by projecting it onto their enemies, perceiving them as subhuman, dirty, impure, and inherently evil (Holt & Silverstein, 1989; Keen, 1986; Silverstein, 1989). Subsequently they behave as though they can achieve perfection and immortality only through the removal of this imperfection, impurity, and evil from the world.

Becker's Approach to Ethnic Wars and Death Anxiety

In his analysis of the phenomena of religious wars and ethnic "cleansing," Becker (1975) also discussed the use of displacement and projection described above:

> Men try to qualify for eternalization by being clean and by cleansing the world around them of the evil, the dirty; in this way they show that they are on the side of purity, *even if they themselves are impure* [italics added]. The striving for per-

2 See Bettelheim's account (1943/1979) of this phenomenon, where prisoners in a German concentration camp imagined they could survive as a group on one occasion where they were required to stand all night in subfreezing temperatures. More than 80 perished, but survivors reported that during the event they "felt" free from fear and therefore were actually happier than at most other times during their camp experiences" (p. 65).

fection reflects man's effort to get some human grip on his eligibility for immortality. (p. 115-116)

In synthesizing the works of Rank, Freud, and Kierkegaard, Becker (1973, 1975) explored the relationship between the fear of death and the social evil which finds its primary expression in warfare. The author is aligned with Becker in hypothesizing that existential dread is the foremost predisposing influence at the core of man's inhumanity to man. Becker and other theorists (Lifton, 1973; Toynbee, 1968b) viewed cultural patterns and social mores as constructions by human beings to alleviate death fears and understood that they generally resulted in aggressive acts against others. Since antiquity, people have believed that they were immortal to the extent that they had power over others and that victory, particularly in a religious war, was an indication of God's favor. Becker (1975) states:

> No wonder the divine kings repeatedly staged their compulsive campaigns and inscribed the mountainous toll of their butchery for all time.... Their pride was holy; they had offered the gods an immense sacrifice and a direct challenge, and the gods had confirmed that their destiny was indeed divinely favored, since the victories went to them. (p. 106)

It is important to stress that the defense mechanisms of displacement and projection also play a significant role in maintaining feelings of divine sanction and specialness within religious groups and nations. As noted previously, they are the dynamic forces underlying racism and genocide. In describing how these defenses work in conjunction with group identification, I stated in another work (Firestone, in press):

> Allegiance and identification with the group, and simultaneous devaluation of others ('outsiders,' 'aliens,' those who do not belong), feeds narcissistic, omnipotent feelings and inflates a sense of self- importance.

In summary, the author proposes that the terror of death, the feeling of utter helplessness in contemplating the cessation of existence as one knows it, provides the impetus driving members of a group or citizens of a nation to build up grandiose images of power at the expense of other groups or nations, to act on their projections and distortions, and to attempt to eliminate impure and despised enemies from the face of the earth.

Interpersonal Dynamics Underlying Group Identification

To develop a better comprehension of ethnic strife, it is necessary to examine the parallels between the psychodynamics in extended groups and societies discussed above and those operating in couples and families. The explanation of group dynamics must begin with an understanding of individual patterns of psychological defense that arise in response to stressful conditions. Interpersonal tension in the family system leads to hostile, guarded and defensive behaviors that are acted out on family members and later extended to outsiders. When groups or societies emerge, individual patterns of defense of the members are pooled and combine to form cultural attitudes and stereotypes.

A Developmental Perspective

The most powerful and effective denial of death is to be found in the fantasy bond, an illusion of connection with another person formed originally with the mother as a compensation for rejection and emotional trauma in the infant's early environment. The extent to which people come to rely on this imaginary fusion is proportional to the degree of frustration, pain, and emotional deprivation experienced early in life. The more inadequate the parenting process, the stronger the anxious, addictive attachment and the greater the reliance on fantasy. The hurt or rejected child clings desperately to the home environment and cannot individuate. Later, this self-parenting process or fusion is transferred to significant others in adult associations. The fantasy bond, an internal self-nourishing and self-punishing process, is a core defense that to varying degrees comes to be preferred over external gratification from others because it provides partial satisfaction of needs, reduces tension arising from deprivation, and later functions to alleviate death anxiety (Firestone, 1990b).

Once the bond is formed, there is a marked tendency to withhold affect in interpersonal relationships and a strong resistance to intrusion. This resistance is inevitable because if the core defense were to break down, the person would be faced once again with the pain of the original trauma. When the fantasy bond is threatened, it gives rise to a powerful fear

reaction as the defended individual anticipates being subject to anguish beyond his/her tolerance level.

In defending themselves against an overload of pain, children depersonalize, fragment, lose feeling for themselves, and become hostile and untrusting of others. By introjecting the negative or hostile parental attitudes and at the same time retaining the painful, "primal" feelings of the helpless child, an individual develops the fantasy of *being at once the good, strong parent and the dirty, weak child.* This split or internalized self-parenting bond predisposes a fear and withdrawal from intimacy and fosters a contentious cynical view that deprives one of compassion for one's fellows. It is this illusion of a totally self-sufficient internal system that becomes the bulwark of one's psychological defense against painful emotions. The introjected parental image takes on the significance of a survival mechanism in the child's mind.

In the context of defending the fantasy bond, negative thought processes, manifested as "inner voices," foster distrust and hostility toward others. Indeed, critical thoughts and abusive attitudes toward oneself are always projected to some extent onto other people. Stereotypes, prejudicial attitudes, and racial biases[3] are extensions of these fundamentally hostile and distorted views of others that provide a pseudo-rational basis for aggressive acts against people who are perceived as different.

Idealization of the Family

As a by-product of introjecting the parental figure, the hurt or damaged child has a need to idealize the real parent at his/her own (the child's) expense (Arieti, 1953/1974; Firestone, 1985). The child must conceptualize him/herself as bad or unlovable in order to defend against the realization of parental inadequacy. This idealization is difficult to refute as one moves out in life and attempts to expand one's boundaries because, to a large extent, it is supported by society's belief in the sanctity of the family.

Indeed, the reason emotional and physical child abuse of *all* varieties has been minimized or denied in our society is that it is an outgrowth of the core defense of family idealization. Unfortunately, in supporting the sacred image of the nuclear family and in protecting parents' rights over their children, society indirectly condones the harm done to children "for their own good." Only in the most blatant instances of child abuse and neglect does the collective idealization of the family break down. While people were outraged at the parents who allowed their children to live and eventually die in the insane and oppressive cults of Jonestown and Waco, they were reluctant to extend their vision to comprehend the fact that those incidents were an extreme manifestation of the complete power, proprietary interest, disrespect, and possessiveness that "normal" parents righteously impose on their children's lives.

Displacement of Negative Parental Traits onto Other People

In preserving an idealized image of their parents, children must dispose of their parents' actual negative qualities. They block from awareness those parental characteristics that are especially threatening and displace them onto other people at the expense of the out-group. By judging their parents as right or superior, and others as wrong or inferior, children, and later adults, preserve their illusions about the family. Stereotypes, prejudice, and racist views represent extensions of these distortions into a cultural framework (Berke, 1988; Henry, 1963; Lasch, 1984). Because they are based on a core psychological defense, they stubbornly persist in the face of logic and contrary evidence. Moreover, in idealizing the family, an individual adopts his/her parents' distortions and biases and imitates their negative responses to people who are seen as different. In this manner, prejudicial attitudes towards specific groups of people and individuals are transmitted intergenerationally.

Vanity—Specialness

Feelings of vanity and specialness are part of the defense system that protects an individual against death anxiety. These defenses manifest themselves in the idealization of the group and leader just as they do in the idealization of the family. Vanity refers here to omnipotent and omniscient attitudes, an aggran-

3 A special subcase of group bias can be observed in "identity politics," prevalent on American campuses and in the workplace. Gitlin (1993), noting this separatist movement, declared: "The long overdue opening of political initiative to minorities, women, gays, and others of the traditionally voiceless has developed its own methods of silencing" (p. 172).

dized fantasy image of self that compensates for deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. It expresses itself in the universal belief that death happens to someone else, never to oneself. Zilboorg (1943) has described the defense of "specialness," so familiar to soldiers going into battle:

> We must maintain within us the conviction that...we, each one of us who speaks of himself in the first person singular, are exceptions whom death will not strike at all. (p. 468)

The popular novel, *The Right Stuff* (Wolfe, 1983), accurately describes this defense as superstition accepted as fact: test pilots who crashed obviously didn't have "the right stuff," that special combination of masculine strength, courage, and competence that guarantees survival.

It is important to note that the extension of vanity as a defensive mechanism to a cultural pattern that exists on a regional or national level has led to virulent racism and genocide throughout history. As noted by Solomon (1986), all isms potentially lead to schisms.

Addictive Attachments

As adults, most individuals tend to form relationships with significant others in a way that duplicates the imagined connection with the parents.[4] In doing so, however, they progressively limit their lives and surrender their own unique point of view and sense of self.

The transference of emotional reactions from early interactions with parents to one's mate and to groups and institutions in a society is largely responsible for the submissive behavior observed in members of a group. The concept of the fantasy bond is similar in many respects to Kaiser's (Fierman, 1965) notion of a "delusion of fusion." Kaiser contended that people's compelling need to surrender their will to another person or a group through this delusion of fusion represents the universal neurosis. The leader of the group becomes one's "god" or "savior," and the group-cause, one's bid for immortality.

In my clinical experience, I have noted that people tend to extend the parent/child split described above to their couple relationships. They intermittently act out dominant/submissive (parent/child) modes in their interactions. Both partners participate in this damaging collusion (Willi, 1975/1982) and find it difficult to disengage because the polarized patterns provide an illusion of safety and wholeness and eventually foster a sense of immortality on an unconscious level.

Once an addictive attachment is formed within the couple, it must be defended at all costs against being disrupted. Anything that threatens to disturb an individual's method of defending him/herself arouses considerable fear. The rise in anxiety results in both aggressive and regressive reactions (Firestone, 1987). In much the same way, people who form a fantasy bond in a group context to cope with death anxiety also react to threats with hostility and angry retaliation. In both cases, the hostility is based on the perceived threat of breaking the illusory connection.

Utilization of the Child as a Symbol of Immortality

In forming a fantasy bond, both members of a couple lack independence and lose a sense of self, and their love relationship is negatively impacted. The use of another for purposes of internal safety and security essentially destroys the fabric of the relationship. The same dynamics apply when the fantasy bond is extended to children born to couples in collusion. Indeed, most parents have children for the wrong reason—as a bid for immortality and a defense against death anxiety.

Parents imagine, on some level, that the child is an extension of themselves, and this "belonging" or merger imbues them with a sense of eternal life (Becker, 1962; Rank, 1936/1972). However, this defense "works" only to the extent that the child is essentially the *same* as the parents in appearance, personality traits, behaviors, and defenses. The more the child is *different* from the parents, the more he/she poses a threat to their illusion of immortality. Therefore, nonconformity and individuation are judged as "bad" while sameness with, or submission to, one's parents is seen as good.

4 In their coupling and with respect to their children, many people mistake feelings of anxious attachment and emotional hunger for feelings of genuine affection and love. They are largely unaware that they are utilizing their partner or their children for purposes of safety, security, and immortality based on an illusion of connectedness (Firestone, 1990a).

In using the child in this way, parents feel both the need and the obligation to impose their standards, beliefs, and value systems on their children, no matter how distorted or maladaptive they are. They transmit their personal attitudes and defenses to their children *both implicitly and explicitly*, that is, by example and by direct instruction. Having been "processed" in this manner, most children grow up feeling alienated from themselves and feel that they have no inherent right to their own point of view as separate human beings. They relinquish their autonomy early in life, and guilt prohibits them from breaking away from the dependency bond with their parents. They find it difficult or virtually impossible to live their own lives with integrity, independent of destructive group and societal influences (Milgram, 1974). Thus, the process of socialization sets the pattern for the adult's conformity to the group.

In conclusion, fear reactions as well as guilt about differentiating oneself from one's family of origin are related to the utilization of the child as a symbol of immortality. When the parental atmosphere is immature, frightened, hostile, or overly defended, the family takes on the quality of a dictatorship or cult, wherein powerful forces operate to control other family members, fit them into a mold, brainwash them with a particular philosophy of life, and manipulate them through guilt and a sense of obligation. This pattern represents an insidious form of emotional child abuse that has not been sufficiently recognized in the psychological literature (Beavers, 1977; Garbarino, Guttmann, & Seeley, 1986; A. Miller, 1981/1984; Shengold, 1989; Srole, Langner, Michael, & Opler, 1962). Children brought up in this manner become mindless, authoritarian personality types (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) that are easily exploited by power-struck leaders and manipulated into a destructive mass (Fromm, 1941; Shirer, 1960).

The Development of Rigid Belief Systems in Individuals and Groups

The degree of hostility and intolerance people manifest toward those of different group identification, religious persuasion, or race is influenced by the extent to which they rely on the fantasy bond as a source of security. People who have been damaged to a significant extent in their early family interactions are more defensive, opinionated, and rigid with respect to their beliefs than their less defended counterparts and tend to react with fear and hostility to racial and cultural differences (Ehrlich, 1973).

Most individuals, though defended, are not usually psychologically disturbed to the extent that the existence of a group with different views causes them to strike out with aggressive or violent acts. However, the majority can be induced into a intense state of hatred or rage by a leader who has pathological needs and who utilizes their fear and insecurity to achieve power (Fromm, 1941; Shirer, 1960).

If the personality makeup of people in a society or nation is rigid and intolerant, their social mores and conventions tend to reinforce a general movement toward a prejudicial view of others. Entire societies are capable of becoming progressively more hostile, paranoid or psychologically disturbed in much the same manner that defended individuals become mentally ill.[5] The more a society is built on insecurity and inflexible belief systems, the more sick it becomes, and the more dangerous to world peace.

This phenomenon was most clearly exemplified in the evolution of an authoritarian Germanic personality-type that tyrannized Europe and was responsible for the Holocaust. The superior, destructive attitudes toward minorities and the sadism manifested to the extreme in the concentration camps represented an acting out by the Germans of internalized aggression toward their child-selves. As children, they had been abused and mistreated under the guise of order and discipline and had, therefore, come to consider themselves as inferior, unworthy, and unclean. In an attempt to absolve themselves of their self-hatred, they then projected these characteristics onto anyone they saw as different and less powerful, such as the Jews and gypsies. They were compelled to mistreat these minority groups in a manner similar to the way they had been mistreated as children.[6] This acting out served to compensate for deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness. The Germans denied

5 Kerr & Bowen (1988) noted that societies can become regressive as the force for togetherness and lower differentiation of self of its members become more prominent during times of stress and chronic anxiety. Laing (1967) wrote about the similarity between dysfunctional families and "sick" societies.

their feelings of inferiority by conceptualizing themselves as a "super race"—a tragic form of social madness.[7]

Institutionalized Defenses Against Death Anxiety

There are a multitude of conventional defenses that militate against facing the fact of mortality; these are utilized by man in an effort to deny and transcend existential finality (Firestone, 1988). Two major forms of defense that have evolved into unique cultural systems can be delineated: (1) religious dogma, including belief in an afterlife, reincarnation, or union with an Ultimate Spiritual Reality or universal consciousness (Toynbee, 1968a); and (2) group identification and nationalism, idolization of the leadership, and mindless allegiance to the group cause.[8]

In a discussion of cultural patterns utilized by individuals to deny death, the author (Firestone, 1990a) wrote:

> All societies and complex social structures are generally restrictive of individuality and personal expression in the face of existential anxiety, and all cultural patterns or practices represent to some extent a form of adaptation to people's fear of death. (p. 322)

Over the millennia, people have created increasingly complex institutions, conventions, belief systems, and sanctions in their attempt to adapt to death anxiety. Each succeeding generation has added its own incremental building blocks to the system of denial and accommodation. Societies for the most part are moving toward more elaborate and effective defenses that act to cut off emotion or dull the highs and lows of life, thereby numbing individuals to basic existential issues. This suppression of feelings and emotions has led to an increase in aggression, violence, and criminality accompanied by a heightened indifference to the suffering of human beings.

Religious Doctrine

For the most part, religious doctrine consists of consensually validated concepts of existential truth. Traditional religious beliefs of both Western and Eastern cultures can be thought to contribute to a collective neurosis whereby defenses against death anxiety reinforce people's tendencies to deny the body (Western) or transcend or devalue the self (Eastern). In a mistaken cause, people strive for selflessness, whereas perversely enough, only by being themselves and accepting their true nature can they contribute to mankind through positive, life-affirming action.

Misinterpretations of teachings originally meant to enhance the spiritual and humane aspects of life have led to this self-denying, self-sacrificing orientation. Theologians since St. Augustine have postulated that the punishment for Adam's act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden was death and have held out the promise that by denying sexual desire and bodily pleasures, one's soul could triumph over the body and survive death (Pagels, 1988). Similarly, many have misunderstood the teachings of Taoism and Buddhism and assumed that all desire, striving, "ego" must be given up in order to attain enlightenment (Suzuki, Fromm, & DeMartino 1960; Watts, 1961).

The question arises as to why millions of people blindly follow religious dogma based on serious distortions of original teachings. Transcendence over the body which must die, the postulation of a soul or spirit, and the union with a powerful being are the principal motivations. Religious dogmatism generally supports a self-destructive process of self-limitation and self-abrogation; yet restricting or suppressing people's natural desires (i.e., sexual and aggressive thoughts and feelings) unwittingly contributes to an increase in the incidence of violence and immoral acting-out behavior (Vergote, 1978/1988).

There are variations in the warlike tendencies of religious groups: some have an aggressive desperation attached to their beliefs, while others are peace-

6 The German government has recently taken cognizance of "Kinderunfreundlichkeit," that is, widespread brutal and destructive attitudes toward children manifested in Germany and Austria, and has instituted a program of legislation to protect young people from insidious forms of physical and emotional child abuse (Meyer, 1991).

7 This pattern persists today in reunited Germany, where angry hordes have been conducting demonstrations against foreigners in the same aggressive style (Bloomstein, 1991; Grass, 1993; Joffe, 1993; Kahn, 1993).

8 This list is clearly not inclusive, but focuses on those psychological defenses that are pertinent to our thesis. Other cultural patterns representing defenses against death anxiety have been described in another work (Firestone, 1985).

loving and generate far less animosity toward people of different persuasions. Religious dogma that is rigid, restrictive, and inflexible function to instill strong hatred and malice in believers toward nonbelievers. In fact, a number of religious groups endorse or demand individual sacrifice in war as a basic tenet of their doctrine: a heroic death in a religious war guarantees entry into the after-life (J. Campbell, 1972; Esposito, 1991; J. Miller, 1993). A primary commitment of these groups is devoted to war and to suicidal terrorist acts.

According to some political analysts, the current Mid-Eastern and Balkan conflicts are based largely on religious motives. From their point of view, the "ethnic cleansing" taking place in Yugoslavia represents yet another stage in a 600-year-old conflict that began with a religious war during the 14th century. One analyst recently discussed the religious background of this tragic conflict:

> Every local warlord sees his own quest for Greater Freedonia as righteous, historically correct and worthy of the most outrageous savagery.... Milosevic may decide to cleanse it [Kosovo] next, avenging his ancestors' loss of this sacred turf to the Turks in 1389. (Klein, 1993, p.44)

In the six intervening centuries between the original religious war and the present-day bloodshed, with the exception of a brief interlude, the people involved in the fighting have maintained hatred and animosity based on old forms of logic and reasoning that no longer have any application to their everyday lives (Moseley, 1992; Moynihan, 1993; Owen, 1993; Puhar, 1993; Schmemann, 1992).[9]

Nationalism and Totalitarianism

> Wherever there is the jealous urge to exclude, there is the menace of extinction. I see no nation on earth at present which has an all-inclusive view of things. I say it is impossible for a nation, as such, to hold such a view....
>
> [Eventually] nations will disappear. The human family does not need these water-tight compartments in which to breathe. There is nothing any longer which warrants the survival of the nations, since to be Russian, French, English or American means to be less than what one really is.
>
> Henry Miller (1947, p. xxii)
> *Remember to Remember*

> Nationalism is an infantile disease, the Measles of Mankind.
>
> Albert Einstein

Nationalism, communism, capitalism, and other isms function as a narcotic, a psychic painkiller that fosters a deep dependency in people who are searching for comfort, security, and relief from ontological anxiety. In any system other than a functioning democracy, the individual subordinates the self in relation to an idea or a principle and experiences a false sense of power (Popper, 1945). The illusion of fusion and connection that comes from being a part of a patriotic or nationalistic movement is exhilarating and addictive. Indeed, any cause, whether potentially good or evil, is capable of fostering a corresponding addiction in the individual.

Totalitarian regimes are generally associated with the outcome of the vacillations of socioeconomic forces, but their roots lie in the psychological make-up of the individual. The destructiveness of Nazism and the Third Reich have been appropriately attributed to the "German" character as manifested in the individual citizen (Fromm, 1941).[10]

When these defenses are threatened by outside influences, people are terrified of reexperiencing the pain, anticipatory grief, and dread of death. Generally, they respond to this anxiety on a preconscious or unconscious level by intensifying their defenses

9 Interestingly enough, under the influence of a powerful leader and united against a common enemy since World War II, these warring groups lived together in peace.

10 Fromm's (1941) *Escape from Freedom* and Shirer's (1960) *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* document the impact of various social forces and historical events on the German people. A particularly cogent description of these phenomena can be found in Shirer's "The Mind of Hitler and the Roots of the Third Reich" (pp. 80-113), in which he traces the psychological underpinnings of the German personality type to the Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Shirer states that "Germany never recovered from this setback. Acceptance of autocracy, of blind obedience to the petty tyrants who ruled as princes, became ingrained in the German mind" (p. 92).

without true awareness. On a more conscious level, however, they become extremely defensive and angry at those who disagree with their solutions and mobilize action against these enemies in a manner similar to medieval crusaders who attempted to impose their fanatic religious beliefs on "heretics" in bloody holy wars.

Empirical Research

The data supporting existential approaches to aggression are primarily observational and longitudinal; however, findings from recent research tend to validate the author's view. Empirical studies that noted an increased reliance on defense mechanisms to maintain self-esteem as a result of the experimentally manipulated arousal of death anxiety provide support for our hypotheses (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). In discussing the implications of this research in terms of "Terror Management Theory," Greenberg, et al. (1990) noted that:

> People's beliefs about reality [and their cultural expressions of such beliefs] provide a buffer against the anxiety that results from living in a largely uncontrollable, perilous universe, where the only certainty is death. (p. 308)

> Enthusiasm for such conflicts [religious wars and ethnic conflict] among those who actually end up doing the killing and the dying is largely fueled by the threat implied to each group's cultural anxiety-buffer by the existence of the other group. (p. 309-310)

Conclusion

In "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," Freud (1915/1957) articulated his views of the inevitability of war: "But war cannot be abolished; so long as the conditions of existence among nations are so different and their mutual repulsion so violent, there are bound to be wars" (p. 299). Freud's pessimism concerning the future of mankind was due largely to his deterministic view of man's aggression based on his notion of the death instinct, yet it also reflected the stress and turmoil of the times he lived in. In the present paper I have shown that man's hostility and violence are responses to painful issues of emotional frustration in growing up, compounded by death anxiety. His defenses to minimize or shut out psychological pain collectively manifest themselves in restrictive, dehumanizing cultural patterns that he feels must be protected at all costs. Our conception of man's aggression as stemming from frustration and fear rather than instinct is congenial with Becker's (1975) view:

> It is one thing to say that man is not human because he is a vicious animal, and another to say that it is because he is a frightened creature who tries to secure a victory over his limitations. (p. 169)

The author's explanation not only provides a clear perspective concerning the underlying meaning of prejudice, racism, and war, but this outlook is also more positive, pragmatic, and action-oriented. It offers hope for the future whereas the deterministic conception of man's essential savagery may well provide a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, pessimistic forecasting generally precludes constructive action, and people feel progressively more demoralized and helpless.

In this paper I do not attempt to offer a simple solution to man's struggle for peace nor do we feel there can be one. However, the lack of an immediate, obvious course of action or definitive pragmatic program should not be interpreted as cause for pessimism or devalued on those grounds. I offer the guidelines that explain aggressive behavior which, if properly understood, could lead to a program of remedial education. This program would enable individuals to come to know themselves in a manner that could effectively alter destructive child-rearing practices and social processes that foster aggression. People must retain feeling for themselves in spite of psychological suffering. Only by piercing our character armor of denial and challenging the use of painkilling addictive substances and habit patterns can we manage to halt the slaughter.

Freud (1915/1957) shaded his own pessimistic view when he declared that people might benefit from an awareness rather than a denial of their mortality:

> Would it not be better to give death the place in reality and in our thoughts which is its due, and to give a little more prominence to the unconscious attitude towards death which we have hitherto so carefully suppressed? (p. 299)

In order to find peace, we must face up to existential issues, overcome our personal upbringing, and learn to live without soothing psychological de-

fenses. In some sense we must continually mourn our own end in order to fully accept and value our lives. There is no way to banish painful memories and feelings from consciousness without losing our sense of humanity and feeling of compassion for others.

Man can overcome his personal limitations and embrace life in the face of death anxiety. Such a man would find no need for ethnic hatred or insidious warfare.

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